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A
S E R M O N
PREACHED AT THE
A S S I Z E S
HOLDEN AT

CHELMSFORD, in ESSEX,

On TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 1773.

BEFORE THE HONOURABLE

MR. BARON PERROTT.

By the Reverend STOTHERD ABDY, M. A.
ARCHDEACON of ESSEX.

L O N D O N:

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S E R M O N

PREACHED AT THE

A S S I S T A N T

MINISTERS

OF THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

OF THE PARISH OF ST. MARTIN

IN THE CITY OF LONDON

THE PARSONS CHURCH

By the Rev. JOHN STUBBS, M.A.
Rector of the Church of St. Martin

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1841

T O
JOHN ARCHER, Esq;
HIGH SHERIFF
OF THE
COUNTY OF ESSEX,
AND TO THE
GENTLEMEN of the GRAND JURY,

VIZ.

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THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE,
Made publick at their unanimous Request,

IS HUMBLY INSCRIBED

By their very obedient Servant,

THE PREACHER.

JOHN ARCHER, Esq.

HIGH SHERIFF

OF THE

COUNTY of ESSEX

AND TO THE

GENTLEMEN of the GRAND JURY,

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THOMAS BROWN, Esq.
WILLIAM ALLEN, Esq.
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THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE

WAS PUBLICLY READ AT THEIR ANNUAL MEETING

IS HUMBL Y INSCRIBED

TO THE GRAND JURY

THE PREACHER

A
S E R M O N
P R E A C H E D A T T H E
A S S I Z E S
H O L D E N A T
C H E L M S F O R D, i n E S S E X,

On TUESDAY, MARCH 16, 1773.

Book of EXODUS—xviiiith Chap. latter Part of 19th Verse.

—Be thou for the People to God-ward;—

JETHRO, the Father in Law of Moses, with the Zeal of a real Patriot for the Good of Israel, and with the Affection of a Parent for the Ease and Welfare of his Son, marked out a Plan for dividing the Weight of Government, in every Respect so judicious in its Circumstances, and so happily adapted to the regular Distribution of Justice throughout a Kingdom, that it became, as
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a Scheme of Policy, the Admiration of succeeding Ages ;—and we of this Nation, in particular, have, for many Centuries, successfully pursued the same undeviating Tract, not only in the Letter, but in the truest Spirit of his Injunctions.

He began with Piety to Heaven ;—*hearken*, says he, *now unto my Voice, I will give thee Counsel, and God shall be with thee ; be thou for the People to God-ward, that thou mayest bring the Causes unto God ;*—as if he had said, “ consider, when you are executing Judgment and Justice between Man and Man, that the Eye of Omniscience is fixed upon you ;—weigh the Importance of that Thought, and let it guide your Determinations ;—ask Counsel of the Almighty in your Decisions, and let the Impartiality of your Proceedings mark you as one of God’s Vicegerents upon the Earth.—

Magistracy, indeed, can never be represented in a more awful, or a more venerable Light, than when it is adorned with a Divine Commission, and armed with Divine Authority ;—our Fore-fathers, therefore, eagerly embraced the Dictates of this original Instructor, and laboured to impress upon the Consciences of their People a religious Dread of an all-seeing Providence ;—and, encouraged, by the
Faith.

Faith and Hope of Christians, they ardently wished to join the Religion of Jesus to that of Nature, and to introduce into the Solemnities of their Courts of Judicature a striking Sense of the great Day of Judgment.

After this awful Introduction, Jethro proceeds to recommend a Delegation of this Power into different Hands ;— *Moreover*, says he, *thou shalt provide Rulers of Thousands, and Rulers of Hundreds, Rulers of Fifties, and Rulers of Tens* ;—and it is worth observing with what exemplary Care and Caution, and with how thorough a Knowledge, and Experience of human Nature, he characterizes the necessary Accomplishments of those *who were to judge the People at all Seasons* ;—they were, in the first Place, to be *able Men* ;—for, without Abilities to execute, and Wisdom to discern it, the Law itself would be a dead Letter, void of all Life or Energy ;—next, says he, let them *be such as fear God* ;—for, if Religion is discarded, the Splendor of the Magistrate will be considerably diminished, and the strongest Tie on the Subject's Part to Reverence and Submission will be too easily dissolved ;—3dly, *Men of Truth* ;—because Integrity

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is a Principle which will preserve a Dispenser of the Laws free from all personal Pique, and personal Affection, and render him superior to all low Suggestions, and illtimed Prejudices ; — again, they were to be *without Covetousness* ; — for a noble and a generous Disposition will make a Ruler deaf to Flattery, and blind to all mean and selfish Views ; — but Covetousness is so engrossing, and, at the same Time, so absolute in its Nature, that nothing can stand with it or against it ; — in a Magistrate's Breast it will, infallibly, be the Measure of Right and Wrong, and will turn the Scale, not to the Interest of Truth, but to its own.

Wisdom, then, and a Veneration for Religion, Integrity, and Generosity of Soul conspired, we see, with their united Powers, in forming Jethro's complete Idea of a worthy Magistrate ; — and where can there be an Assemblage of human Virtues brighter to the View, or more properly adapted to the grand original Design of executing Judgment and Justice in the Earth ? — Our Ancestors, struck with the Propriety and Force of this great Example, searched the Land for the Possessors of these Accomplishments, and placed them *high in the Congregation* ; — and, if the Annals of our History should be consulted, it will be found, I apprehend, that, with
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the fewest Exceptions that can be imagined, and with making some Allowances for that necessary Imperfection which attends all sublunary Beings, the Tide of Justice has rolled on, for many succeeding Generations, in one pure uncorrupted Stream;—long blest with an impartial Administration of it throughout the Kingdom, (and never more secure of its being impartially administered than in the Hands of our present Magistrates) we still enjoy, and are sure of, all the Protection in our Rights, which the Law, and the Ministers of the Law, can give us;—we still have Reason to expect the fairest Decisions of our civil Controversies, and still have the Happiness of seeing a regular Execution of salutary Laws under a well-digested Establishment.

Thus far all is well—and, in this Respect, certainly, we are an happy People, that we can lay ourselves down to rest *under our own Vine and Fig-tree*, with the satisfying Thought that any Invader of our Rights would receive exemplary Rebuke, and we ourselves ample Redress from the Tribunals of Justice;—but here all our Boastings cease;—for, to a feeling Heart, the very Occasion of these Solemnities carries with it many awful and striking Circumstances;—^d *the Law, we know, was*
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^d 1 Tim. i. 9.

*not made for a righteous Man, but for a Sinner ; —for the Lawless and Disobedient, for the Ungodly and Profane, for Murderers of Fathers, and Murderers of Mothers ;—and it is a melancholy Reflection to consider what a World of Impiety and Wickedness, what a Variety of unhappy Litigations, and Thefts, and Perjuries, twice in every Year, engage the Attention and Employment of our Judges, in their Progress over this great Kingdom. —To what Causes are we to ascribe these foul Enormities ?—To what, indeed, with any Appearance of Propriety, but to that general Unconcern for Religion, which has spread its Contagion over all Ranks and Conditions of Men ; to that Luke-warmness, and Affectation of Indifference for every Thing sacred or serious, which has advanced itself to an alarming Height, and may, with too much Justice, be called National ; — the People are not for themselves, nor are *we for the People*, sufficiently, *to God-ward* ;—I do not take upon me to lay the Charge of Negligence upon any particular Set of Men,—we are most of us, I am afraid, in the Rank of unprofitable Servants,—but the Cause lies deeply rooted, and requires the joint Force of Hand and Heart for its Extirpation ; much of it, perhaps, might be removed, could the*

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the Labours of the Clergy be strengthened and encouraged by the Example and Attention of the greater World ; — our Exhortations would then descend upon our People with double Weight ; — by regularly instilling, in this prevailing Manner, sound Principles of Christianity into their Hearts, we might flatter ourselves with the Hopes of discerning, in good Time, those Hearts made better ; — and, though our most earnest Pains could never lead us to the View of superseding either the Necessity or the Frequency of these judicial Proceedings, we might yet have the Satisfaction, by persevering in the Work of Righteousness, of hearing, at last, of less crowded Jails, and fewer vexatious Contests.

When I am speaking, however, of the immediate Necessity of turning Men's Hearts *to Godward*, I do not mean the instilling into their Minds only a cold and languid System of Moral Truths, but I mean the impressing upon their Souls the Religion of the Bible, and the great Sanctions of the Gospel of Jesus Christ—the fixing their Attention upon the Means of Grace in this World, and the Hopes of Glory hereafter ; — for these are the grand Restoratives that alone can reach the Cause of their Disorders.—The Man,

who can be made sensible of the Duty of imploring the Assistance of God's holy Spirit upon all he does, will hardly, afterwards, be found sitting in the Scorners's Chair, or be heard uttering profane or blasphemous Expressions ;---the Man, who can once possess himself with a full Conviction of the Merits of his Redeemer, instead of having Recourse to Theft or Perjury for his Subsistence, will enjoy, even in the hardest Seasons, the comfortable Assurance that *all Things work together for Good to them that love God* ;—and he, that has imbibed, and has taught himself afterwards to retain, an awful Dread of the great Day of Retribution, will never, I apprehend, be called upon to hold up his Hand at the Bar of any human Judicature.

But, the great and valuable Advantages which may, probably, arise to the Community, from a regular Endeavour, on our Parts, to turn the Souls of Individuals *to God-ward*, may appear to us, perhaps, in a more convincing Manner, if we take a View of the Reverse ;—I mean if we form to our Imaginations some of those miserable Scenes which are too likely to be every Day offered to our Observation both in those lower and
higher

higher Walks of Life, where Christianity is supposed to have lost its Hold upon the Conscience.

If an irreligious Spirit, for Instance, takes up its Residence in the Cottage of a poor Man, what is it can issue out afterwards from thence, but Wickedness in every Shape that can be imagined? The wretched Owner of the Place, fearing neither God or Devil, is himself the Carver of his own Ill-fortune, and employs that Strength of Arm, which might have procured him the Bread of Honesty with Comfort, in breaking down the Fences both of Law and Order, or in murdering his innocent, but richer, Neighbour. — His Habitation, in the mean Time, is the Receptacle for House-breakers, Highwaymen, and Assassins; where they plan their Schemes, and frame their horrid Resolutions, till they are seized upon by the Ministers of Justice, and dragged to a Destruction as ignominious as their Conduct. — And yet, possibly, this same poor Man, had he been originally taught *to work out his Salvation with Fear and Trembling* — had he been early instructed in the Ways of an all-gracious Providence, and learnt *to possess his Soul in Patience* during the Storms of Adversity, — instead of appearing with Shame and Confusion written upon his Forehead, he

he might have passed all his Days with Credit, and have proved himself the happy Father of many useful Generations.

If, again, an irreligious Spirit should spread its malignant Influence over, what are generally esteemed, the middle Ranks of Society, the fatal Consequences of its Power may be too easily conjectured;—industrious Artificers and reputable Tradesmen are led by it, insensibly, to a fond and foolish Imitation of their Superiors;—this occasions an Inattention to all necessary Business;—they are then induced to herd with a Set of abandoned Companions, whose loose and lewd Conversation unhinges every Obligation of the Conscience, and teaches them to look upon all sacred Inspiration as a Jest;—afterwards, *they walk, as by the* ^a *Description of St. Peter, in the Lust of Unclean-ness, and despise Government; they grow presumptuous and self-willed, they are not afraid to speak Evil of Dignities; Spots they are, and Blemishes, sporting themselves with their own Deceivings, beguiling unstable Souls;—by Degrees their Credit grows suspected;—to redeem it, they hazard both their own and other People's Pro-*
perty

^a 2 Peter ii. 10, 12, 13, 14.

perty in one desperate Stake, which proves the Completion of their Ruin;—then follow Bankruptcies, which are much oftener, it is to be feared, the Effects of Villainy than of Misfortune, and which leave all their unhappy Creditors to sink under the Weight of Disappointment;—and, perhaps, at last, as a Conclusion of the Whole, the melancholy Scene of Action is closed in Suicide.—And, yet, possibly, these very lost, unthinking Wretches, could they have originally imbibed, and, afterwards, contentedly have submitted to, that unfashionable Doctrine of the Apostle, *of not thinking more highly of themselves than they ought to think*,—could they have seriously believed, from the Beginning, how important a Matter it is *to keep a Conscience void of Offence towards God and towards Man*,—instead of meeting their Friends and Neighbours with the clouded Eye of Jealousy and Confusion, their Example might have saved many a rising Family from Destruction, and their Industry might have improved both the Wealth and Reputation of their Country.

But, the Motions of an irreligious Spirit may, perhaps, be traced still higher.—And, should we see it approaching towards the superior Orders of Mankind, we may, with Reason, dread the Result
of

of its baneful Efforts ;—for, in such a Case, what is there either of Admonition or Example that could have Weight enough to preserve the Marriage-bed inviolate — to give Protection and due Distinction to Virgin Chastity—to lessen the Rage of Play—or change those Notions of false Honour which have brought Distress or Shame upon the most illustrious Families ;—and yet, possibly, could those of exalted Rank, who are now indulging themselves in vicious Gaiety and Dissipation, could they, in their cooler Hours, be induced to recollect that, for Crimes committed against Law, they are equally amenable to Justice with the lowest of their fellow Subjects, the disdainful Thought, perhaps, of appearing publickly under such mortifying Circumstances might check and restrain some of their inordinate Proceedings ;—and, could they be persuaded further, in some serious Moment, to carry on this Thought to a remoter Distance, even beyond their own latter Days, and, by Analogy of Reasoning, figure to themselves the Eye of that God, *who made of one Blood all the Nations of the Earth*, looking with equal Favour both upon the Prince and Peasant, and making no other Distinction than that of the faithful and unfaithful Servant, —could they be engaged thus far—the Seriousness of the Reflection might make them feel themselves
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to be Men and Mortals, and might be the happy Means of convincing them both of the Propriety and Necessity of being good as well as great.

It were to be wished the Progress of this irreligious Spirit could be pursued no further ;—but, I am afraid, it may be said it has found its Way even into our excellent Constitution, both in Church and State ;—and that its bad Effects are too sensibly experienced, both in civil and ecclesiastical Considerations ;—in regard to temporal Affairs, it has turned Liberty into Licentiousness—it has laboured to confound all Distinctions of Men and Manners ;—and it has struggled to sap and undermine the very Foundation of Government, under Pretence of restoring the native Purity of its Principles ;—in our ecclesiastical Concerns it has assumed the innovating Temper ;—and, with the plausible Declaration of meaning nothing more than the reducing every Thing to the Simplicity of Scripture, each Test of Orthodoxy is to be removed—Openings are to be made wide enough for the Admission even of Infidelity itself,—and our, once admired, Liturgy is to be garbled and new-modelled through the Suggestions of Caprice ;—I do not mean, however, to throw the Imputation of Design or Artifice upon every declared Scruple of the Conscience ;—a doubt-
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ing Heart may be both sincere and honest ;—and Redress of Grievances never can be expected unless we are permitted to utter our Complaints ;—but yet, an Enemy, we know, may infuse Poison in the most palatable Draught, and that in so imperceptible a Manner, as to render it impossible for any human Power to distinguish it before it has been fatally swallowed down.—

The final Decision, indeed, of these important Matters, whether temporal or ecclesiastical, must ever be submitted to the Wisdom and Sagacity of our Rulers ;—they, certainly, are the best Judges how far they can with Safety venture to loosen even one Link of the great Chain of Government ; and as the famous Declaration of *nolumus leges Angliæ mutari* has, hitherto at least, been esteemed the Result of sound Policy, and a deep Knowledge of Mankind, it will, undoubtedly, both in a civil and a religious Light, have its due Weight with our Superiors ;—for, let it be granted, on the one Hand, that some Alteration in our penal Laws—some happier Plan for defraying the Expence, and lessening the Trouble of Prosecutions—some Scheme for shortening the Proceedings of the Courts of Justice, might be rationally wished for ; — let it be allowed, on the other Hand, that a few useless Repetitions might be

be expunged out of our Liturgy—or that some of our Prayers or Thanksgivings might have a more edifying Influence upon the People, if they were better adapted to an improved Construction of the Bible, or to the more enlightened Ideas of the World;—granting all this, I say, yet it cannot be expected that, for these slighter Circumstances, the Legislature should risque the unhinging that complicated frame of Laws, in the composing of which the Wisdom of Ages was employed;—or that, for every Trifle of an Objection, it should assist in rending asunder that important Alliance between Church and State, which may justly be regarded as a most necessary Strengthenener of the Hands of Government.

From the View that has been here taken of the probable Difference of Conduct in Mankind, when actuated by a religious, or by a contrary Principle, the Expediency of putting in Force the solemn Injunction of the Text must, I should think, be strikingly apparent;—for *Godliness, we are assured, is profitable to all Things, and has the Promise of this Life, as well as of that which is to come;—* and the Well-being of the World has, in reality, a much greater Dependence upon the conscientious

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Behaviour

Behaviour of Individuals, than we are, in general, willing to imagine.

In every Sense, then, of the Expression, let us *be for the People to God-ward*;—first, and most especially, in these judicial Solemnities, may the Magistrate, when he places himself in the Seat of Judgment, ever bear in Mind that he is going to execute the Cause of God as well as Man;—and may those that are concerned, either in making Inquisition, or bearing Testimony, carry constantly in their Hearts, what is the most awful of all Reflections, that *the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth*, and that *the Eyes of the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords, are in every Place, beholding the Evil and the Good*;—for Life and Death are in their Hands;—the sacred Property, and the natural Birthright, and Inheritance of their fellow Creatures lie at Stake.

Next—in regard to the much wished-for Improvement of the religious Principle in the Hearts and Lives of the Community, may we live to see its great and valuable Advantages realized in each different Degree;—in the lower Ranks of Life, may

may Industry and Duty, Subordination and mutual Comfort, Righteousness and Peace embrace each other;—in the trading, or commercial, or middle Parts of Life, may Luxury and Dissipation never find an Advocate;—but, on the contrary, may Integrity and righteous Dealing wait upon all their laudable Endeavours, and strengthen both their own and the Nation's truest Interest;—and, with respect to that higher Order of Men, who are Legislators of the Kingdom by Inheritance, may an ardent Zeal for transmitting, pure and untainted to their Descendants, that illustrious Blood which they derived from their great Progenitors, preserve them within that Line of Duty, which the Laws of Nations, Nature, and Christianity have marked out for them as well as others;—that we may not say, as with the Prophet^a, *our Nobles have sent their Little ones to the Water, but they themselves came to the Pits, and found no Water, they returned with their Vessels empty.*

Lastly—in relation to all religious Differences, may Decency and Candour attend every Step of our Proceedings;—and may Uncharitableness never occupy the Place of Unanimity;—for ecclesiastical

^a Jerem. xiv. 3.

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cal Uncharitableness is generally esteemed of all Evils the most to be deplored and dreaded, because it is the most difficult of all Employments to root it out of the Heart of Man.

And, whilst some, in consequence of vague and unsettled Dispositions, boast themselves to be¹ of *Paul*, and others of *Apollos*;—whilst some, they know not why, are joining themselves to *Cephas*, and a few, perhaps only a very few, in reality, to *Christ*,—may I be permitted to remind them how right and necessary it is that all, of every Denomination, should shew themselves *for the People to God-ward, in all Godliness and Honesty*;—

There is a memorable Part of Scripture History, which, though not exactly alike in all its Circumstances, appears, in some Measure, to resemble both the late Situation of our civil, and the present State of our religious Contests;—the Admonition, at least, at the Conclusion, merits our Attention;—I shall close this Discourse with a short Recital of it, and leave it with the present Audience, that they may draw from it its proper Inference.

Under

* Under the Reign of the good Josiah, and for many Years backward, there had been an unhappy Breach and Division amongst the Offspring of Jacob;—the twelve Tribes, that came peaceably together out of Egypt, were broken into two great Parties;—Israel was against Judah, Throne against Throne, and Altar against Altar;—during these unnatural Troubles and Confusions, Jeremiah was sent by the Almighty to tell all the People their Transgressions, and to soften their Obstinacy and Hardness;—he shewed them the Steps of their Fore-fathers; he bad them walk, as the Saints and Servants of God did walk, in the Days of old;—he required them to lay aside their Love of Novelty, to return to that sound, and good, and holy Religion, which had been established in the Beginning; and to render a perfect Obedience to that Theocracy under which they had been happily distinguished as God's peculiar People;—and thus said the Lord, by the Mouth of his inspired Prophet, *Stand ye in the Ways and see, and ask for the old Paths, where is the good Way, and walk therein, and ye shall find Rest unto your Souls.*

* 1st and 2d Book of Kings.

¹ Jerem. vi. 16.

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Under the Reign of the good King David
for many Years backward, there had been a
happy Peace and Union amongst the
of Jacob;—the twelve Tribes, that were
ably together out of Egypt, were broken into two
great Parties;—Israel was against Judah, Thome
against Thome, and Acher against Acher—being
these numerous Tribes and Clans, the
remains were left by the Almighty to all the
People their Transgressions, and as a punishment
Obedience and Happiness;—the Lord said to
Steps of their Transgressions; he had done well as
the Lord said to David, I will be with thee
Days of old;—he required them to pay me: the
Love of Novels, to return to that kind, and
good, and holy Religion, which had been of old
ed in the Kingdom; and to render a perfect obe-
dience to that Liberty, which I had
been happily distinguished as God's peculiar Pro-
ple;—and thus said the Lord, by the Mouth of his
informed Prophet: Great was the Name of the
Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, who was
and was the Lord of Hosts, who was the Lord of Hosts.

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